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ABSTRACT

Conducted by the Pennsylvania Office of Children, Youth and Families, this study compared findings of unannounced and announced licensing inspections of child care centers and homes. A statewide random sample of 377 child care centers and homes were selected to be reviewed through an unannounced inspection. All had been inspected within the previous 6 months through an announced visit. Programs were matched and compared from the announced to the unannounced inspections with regard to the number of noncompliance violations of state child care regulations. The dependent measure was discrepant citations, defined as the center or home being in compliance with a specific regulation at the announced inspection but out of compliance with the same regulation at the unannounced inspection. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant number of discrepant citations related to caregiver-child ratios, protective electrical covers, toxics, building surfaces, play equipment, and medication/diets. Further analyses revealed that highly compliant providers did not show the highly discrepant citations related to violations of child care regulations between announced and unannounced inspections, but all the highly discrepant citations occurred with the low compliant providers. The study concludes that conducting unannounced inspections is a worthwhile practice by state licensing professionals, but conducting unannounced inspections on all providers indiscriminately is not a good use of limited state resources. (KB)

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UNANNOUNCED VS. ANNOUNCED LICENSING INSPECTIONS IN MONITORING CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

Monitoring of child care programs is a key factor in insuring the overall quality of facilities. Research has demonstrated the positive impact of overall monitoring (Aronson and Fiene have written extensively on this topic) as it relates to safeguarding young children in child care centers. However, the nature of the monitoring efforts has been hotly debated by licensing professionals over the past two decades. Should licensing and monitoring visits be announced or unannounced? Arguments can be made on both sides regarding this issue. A provider of service should have the opportunity to put forth their best foot prior to licensing inspector (argument for announced inspections), but should this not also occur at all times and not just when inspections are impending (argument for unannounced inspections).

In reviewing the research literature, there has been very little published on this topic, although there appears to be a great deal of anecdotal evidence to support the above arguments. In order to determine empirically if there is a difference in announced versus unannounced inspections, a study was conducted by the Deputy Secretary of the Office of Children, Youth and Families after a child's death had occurred in a child care facility. The Pennsylvania General Assembly and the executive branch were very concerned about the safety of all children in child care.

METHOD

A statewide random sample of child care centers and group child care homes were selected (n=377) to be reviewed through an unannounced inspection modality. These programs were visited in the previous six months in an announced fashion for their licensing review. The study was conducted by the Bureau of Child Day Care Services in Pennsylvania during the summer of 1995. The data were collected by their regional licensing staff and analyzed by their research staff. Programs were matched (n=191) and compared from the announced inspection to the unannounced inspection. The number of non-compliance violations with state child care regulations were determined.

The McNemar test for nominal data was selected to analyze the number of discrepant citations between the announced and the unannounced inspection. The key question was whether there were significantly more citations of violations during the unannounced as versus the announced inspection. An abbreviated set of key child care regulations was used to cite for violations.

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RESULTS

The first question regarding the difference between announced and unannounced inspections and the resultant citations of violations with state child care regulations was rather affirmative (see attached chart, Compliance with Child Care Center Regulations--Announced Versus Unannounced Inspections). Pay particular attention to the first column because this depicts the number of discrepant citations* between announced and unannounced inspections. Regulations concerning ratios, protective electrical covers, toxics, building surface, play equipment, and medication/diets are all statistically significant. This means that there was a statistically significant number of discrepant citations related to violations of child care regulations when announced and unannounced inspections occurred.

However, a second and equally intriguing question surfaced as the study was being conducted. Based upon experiences of the author in accrediting programs nationally, a secondary analysis was proposed to look at differences between highly compliant providers and low compliant providers. When these analyses were completed, a significantly different picture appeared. The high compliant group did not show the highly discrepant citations related to violations of child care regulations between announced and unannounced inspections, but rather all the highly discrepant citations between announced and the announced inspections occurred with the low compliant providers. (See the attached chart and pay particular attention to the second and third columns). The third and fourth columns give the number of discrepant citations in which providers were cited when compared from the announced to the unannounced inspections. The fourth column gives the chi-square of the key child care regulations. The graphic on the last page gives the number of discrepant citations related to violations of child day care regulations for the high, low, and statewide compliance groups.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from this study that conducting unannounced inspections is a worthwhile endeavor by state licensing professionals. However, these unannounced inspections should be targeted to child care providers with a history of low compliance with state child care regulations. The results in this study were exactly the same for child care centers and for group child care homes.

Conducting unannounced inspections on all providers indiscriminantly is not a good use of limited state resources. State agencies need to provide a balance of announced and unannounced licensing inspections, and this balance needs to be based upon the compliance history of the providers in the field. By using this type of approach, it helps to target state staff to follow-up with problem providers while not penalizing the high quality providers.

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*discrepant citation = the child care center or group child care home was in compliance on the specific regulation at the announced inspection, but was out of compliance on the same regulation at the unannounced inspection.

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COMPLIANCE WITH CHILD CARE CENTER REGULATIONS-- ANNOUNCED VERSUS UNANNOUNCED VISITS****

KEY CHILD CARE REGULATIONS	Statewide (n=191)	Compliance Groups: High Compliant (n=87)	Low Compliant (n=104)	
	(Number of discrepant citations)			chi-sq
20/21 General health and safety	14	0	14	n.s.
25 Availability of certificate	12	2	10	n.s.
32 Child abuse clearances	18	3	15	n.s.
51/52 Ratios	37***	6	31***	19.31
61 Indoor space	4	1	3	n.s.
63 Unsafe areas in outdoor space	10	0	10	n.s.
65 Protective electrical covers	35***	3	32***	24.74
66 Toxic	35**	3	32**	11.80
76 Building surface requirements	32*	3	29*	9.50
79 Firearms	0	0	0	n.s.
102 Play equipment	32*	6	26*	3.69
113 Supervision	20	4	16	n.s.
115 Water activity	20	1	19	n.s.
124 Emergency contact	28	5	23	n.s.
133 Medication diets	31**	3	28**	14.67
175 Safety restraints	2	0	2	n.s.

McNemar Test for Nominal Data--Chi-square significance levels (column 4):
* ($p < .05$) ** ($p < .01$) *** ($p < .001$) n.s. = not significant

191 programs were utilized in these analyses.

**** These data clearly demonstrate the significant differences between announced and unannounced visits (column 1). By doing unannounced visits, additional non-compliance with state child day care regulations is found at program sites. However, when high compliant programs are compared with low compliant programs a totally different picture appears, in which the high compliant programs are significantly in-compliance while the low compliant programs are not in-compliance (columns 2 & 3). This additional analysis suggests that unannounced visits need to focus on non-compliant programs (column 3) and should not be used with all programs indiscriminantly (column 2).

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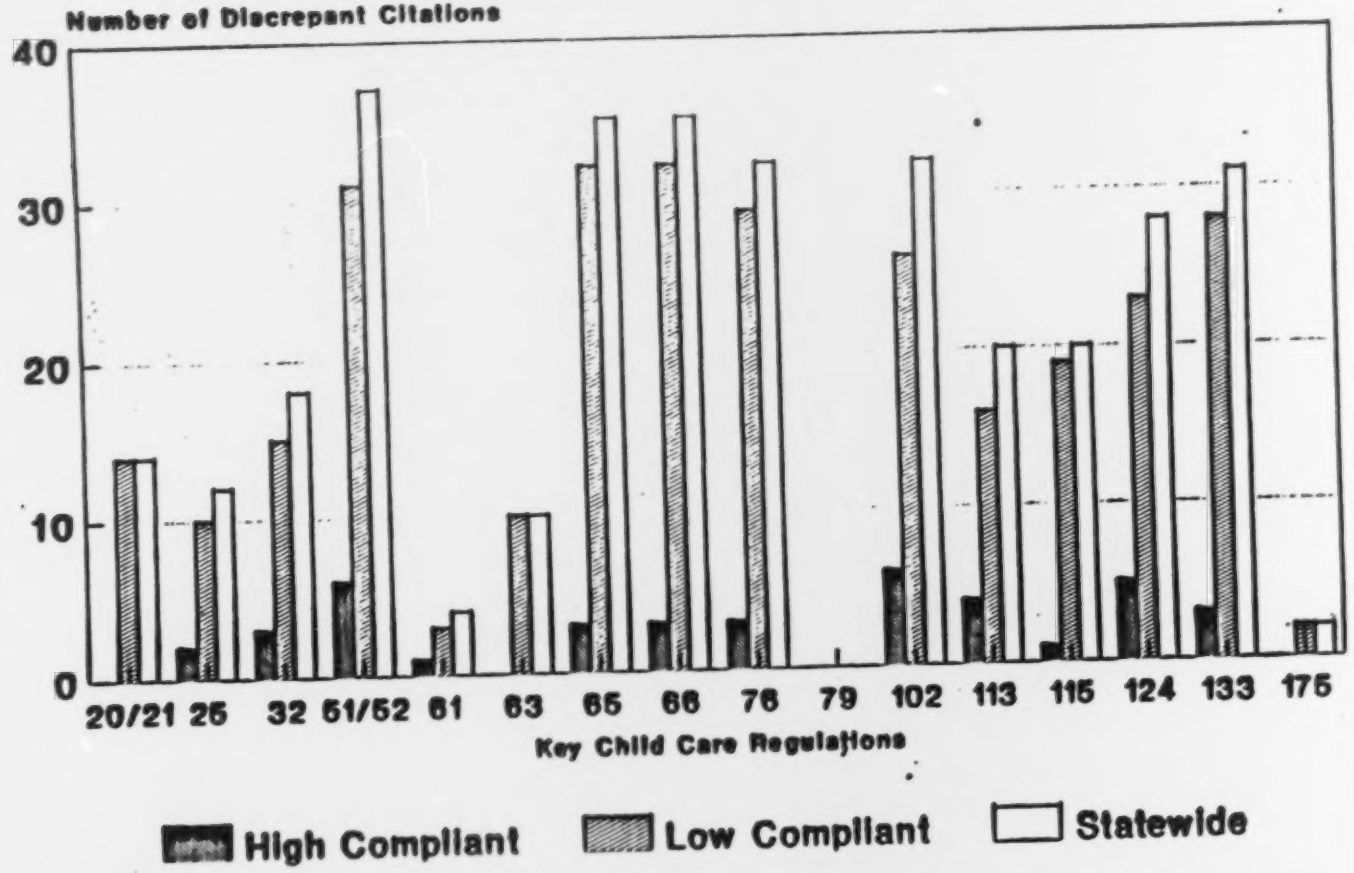
Compliance with Child Care Center Regs
Announced vs Unannounced Visits



Dr Fiene PSU Data Base (10/95)

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